

'I don't think you could have put me to sleep if I had not been half dazed to begin with. You could not do it again.'

'You think so? Let me try.' She raised her eyes to his and Teddy looked into hers. For a few minutes he withstood their influence, but, despite his efforts, consciousness gradually left him. She touched his eyelids with her fingers, and he remembered no more until he found himself walking by her side a mile from the cottage.

'You are a veritable witch!' he exclaimed. He was both humiliated and alarmed. It seemed that Valeria could do with him what she would.

'You are vexed and I am very sorry,' she said softly. 'But when I have put a person to sleep once, I can always do it a second time—easily. You thought I could not. Don't be vexed, Edouardo. I won't do it again—unless you ask me. You say I am beautiful. Well, your eyes are the most beautiful I ever saw, so bright and blue; and your laugh is music to me, and your voice—don't be angry with me, Edouardo.'

And she laid her hands on his shoulders and looked at him with be-seeing eyes.

This was more than flesh and blood could stand. Teddy clasped the witch in his arms and pressed his lips passionately to her.

'There I knew you could not be angry with Valeria long,' she exclaimed, laughing, 'I can make any man love me; but never before have I allowed a man to embrace me. Let us go back to the chalet.'

Was this innocence or guile? Redfern could not tell. The girl was an enigma. But the incident had him very unhappy; for though he was neither a St. Antony nor a Joseph he was a decent fellow. He had pledged his troth to Barbara Stalmine, and he meant to be true to her—if he could. And he did not really love Valeria—it was an infatuation, as humiliating to him as it was dangerous to her; an infatuation which he felt only in her presence and ascribed, rightly or wrongly, to her hypnotic powers. He had not written to Barbara since he left Faïdo, and in two or three days would have outstayed his leave of absence. He felt that he must take some decisive step and that quickly.

The decisive step was taken on the following morning. He rose early. Valeria was gone up the mountain to look after the kine. Francisca told him.

'I am going for a short walk,' he said, and leaving the chalet, walked swiftly down the mountain—sometimes running. In two hours he was at Faïdo, in three, travelling towards Hellinzona in a post chaise drawn by two fast horses.

Rather an ignominious flight, but Teddy felt that he had done well to get away before it was too late; and only those who know what it is to be alternately fascinated and hypnotized by a woman of diabolic beauty have a right to condemn him.

Thirty six hours later he was dining at the Scribblers' Club, and the following morning found him at Witherslack Hall. Barbara gently reproached him for not having written to her; she had received only two letters since they parted at Lausanne, and he had promised to write at least every other day. But when he told of a bad fall, a sprained ankle, and a forced sojourn in a mountain chalet, she was all sympathy and pity.

'If she only knew!' thought Teddy with an inward tremor.

They were married in the autumn as had been arranged. It had also been arranged that they should travel through France to Italy, spend the winter and part of the spring in Rome; the summer in the Tyrol. This was Mrs Stalmine's plan for dodging the Witch's Curse. For though she did not believe in it 'the least bit,' she insisted, like the wise woman she was, on her daughter taking the benefit of the doubt, and doing all she could to avert the omen.

When the happy couple were about to leave Paris (where they stayed several days), it became a question as to the route by which they were to cross the Alps. He proposed the Mont Cenis route; she was all for the St. Gothard.

'The year is waning;—the pass will be deep in snow,' objected Teddy.

'So much the better,' exclaimed Barbara, 'sledding through an Alpine pass will be a new and delightful experience.'

He gave way, of course, albeit against the grain, for even the remote possibility of meeting Valeria could not be contemplated without serious misgiving.

And then, as he and his bride sped southward, a strange thing happened. Though Redfern desired most strenuously never to see or hear of La Strega again, he began to fear that he should see her, that when he got to the neighbourhood of Faïdo an influence stronger than his own will would compel him to leave Barbara and seek out Valeria in her mountain home.

Could it be that during one of his hypnotic trances the witch had cast a spell over him—ordered him to return at a certain time, and that the time drew near?

The thought was horror, yet, though he fought against the impulse—if impulse it were—with all his might, it grew upon him hour by hour, and it was all he could do to hide from his wife the anxiety and terror which consumed him.

From Kluelen they travelled post, and on wheels to Gosschenen, where, as snow lay thick on the ground, they had to exchange their carriage for a large sledge.

The descent from the Hospice is made in small sledges, each drawn by one horse and carrying two persons—the driver and a passenger. In the first rides Redfern, in the second Barbara, in the third her maid; the fourth is a baggage fourgon. Then follow other travellers in other sledges, winding swiftly down the zig-zag road.

They are midway down the Tremola gorge, and Barbara a lost in admiration of the magnificent scene before her, glittering peaks, towering precipices, fathomless gorges, great glaciers, and, above all, a cloudless corulean sky and a glorious sun.

'Look at that girl!' says Redfern's driver.

Redfern looks. The sight he sees strikes him dumb, and he turns as white as the snow around him.

The girl, who stands at a turn in the road, is Valeria. Her tall form is drawn up to its full height, her right arm is stretched towards him, her eyes glow with excitement, and her attitude is imperious and commanding.

'Stop, Edouardo! stop, I command you!' she cries.

A peal of thunder, a roar as if the earth were being torn asunder, and rocks shot up from the depths; a huge white cloud comes leaping down from the mountain tops, and

Redfern and Barbara, horses and drivers, are swept from the road in a whirlwind of powdered snow.

When the air clears, as it does in a few seconds, it is found that only the two leading sledges have been engulfed; whereupon the occupants of the other sledges—drivers and travellers alike—begin the work of rescue, and the buried alive are rescued—save for a few bruises and the fright—upon the worse; and, after a short rest at the nearest refuge, resume their journey.

That evening in the hotel while dressing for dinner Barbara asked, 'What has become of that woman? How noble of her to warn you, Teddy?'

It was perhaps lucky that she was at that moment intent on giving the final touches to her hair and did not notice, how strangely discomposed her husband was at the question.

Nobody could tell; but as her body was not found in the snow, and one of the drivers averred that he had seen her running down the path, it was taken for granted that she had escaped. Be that as it might, the incident seemed to have broken the spell; as the impulse to seek Valeria troubled Teddy no more, and he and his wife reached Rome without further mishap.

The reader will also be glad to know that Mrs Stalmine's scheme for dodging the Witch's Curse proved effectual, for albeit ten years have elapsed since these things came to pass, no harm has befallen Barbara, and she and her husband (who, by the way, is still a member of the Scribblers' Club) are the happy parents of sons and daughters.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE, WELLINGTON.

BRILLIANT RECEPTION TO THE EARL AND COUNTESS OF HOPETOUN.

(GRAPHIC SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.)

WELLINGTON, March 2.

THE Earl and Countess of Glasgow held a large 'At Home' last night at Government House, the guests being invited 'to meet His Excellency the Governor of Victoria and Lady Hopetoun,' and the assemblage, which was not a very large one, was perhaps the most brilliant ever seen in the Empire City. Everyone wore their best frocks without the least fear of their being trampled upon and torn to ribbons, as usually happens at a large ball, and everyone looked fresh the whole evening. Undoubtedly a reception, although perhaps not the acme of bliss for young people, has its advantages, and this particular reception was much enjoyed.

The Earl and Countess of Glasgow stood at the entrance to the drawing-room and shook hands as each one was announced, after which each one was introduced by Lord Glasgow to Lord and Lady Hopetoun, who stood next, and when all the announcing was over a great many of the guests were introduced to the Duchess of Buckingham and Chandos and the others belonging to the house party.

A band was stationed in the conservatory and played beautiful music during the evening, and people strolled about the large rooms admiring the exquisite decorations, and chatting or partaking of light refreshments, which were served in the dining-room.

At one end of the drawing-room was a bank of greenery and flowers lit with fairy lamps of different colours, and pretty little bowers were cunningly contrived everywhere with seats, etc. The conservatory was thrown open and prettily lit, and the long corridor and staircase were chiefly decorated with greenery and coloured shaded lamps, altogether the effect being very pretty. In the drawing-room one mantelpiece was covered with lovely china asters of every colour, another with bright yellow flowers and so on, every available place being effectively decorated with flowers and ferns.

I do not think (says our correspondent) I ever saw so many beautiful dresses, and nearly all were new—in fact it was quite entertaining just to sit still and watch the gaily dressed ladies wandering about.

The Countess wore a magnificent gown of white silk brocaded in the Pompadour fashion with tiny pink and blue buds, the train was yards and yards long, and the huge short puffed sleeves were composed of old rose velvet, the long Watteau streamers being of old rose and turquoise blue velvet ribbon. The low corsage was softened with lovely lace and caught with diamonds, and Lady Glasgow wore her coronet and necklet of diamonds.

Lady Hopetoun's gown was of a lovely palest grey shade of satin brocaded with variously tinted flowers, the basque and front of the corsage being trimmed with very deep gold fringe with touches of pink about it, diamond ornaments and a pink band in her hair, and long train. The Duchess of Buckingham wore a magnificent gown of thick cream silk richly brocaded all over with a Grecian pattern in gold, the bodice trimmed with old lace, and she wore lovely diamond

and pearl ornaments, and also wore a black fine lace head-dress held by a diamond ornament in front and falling on the shoulders at the back. The Ladies Augusta, Alice and Dorothy Boyle were all dressed alike in cream soft silk and tan shoes and stockings. Miss Hallows wore a flowing gown of pink material trimmed with white lace and ribbons; and Miss Wolfe Murray wore a lovely gown of white silk and satin, being arranged in broad stripes, the corsalet embroidered with coloured flowers, the Watteau bow also of flowered ribbon, huge white chiffon puffed sleeves and moonstone ornaments. Miss Wanchope wore pale blue silk spotted with black, black moiré Empire belt and puffed sleeves. The house party also included Lord Northesk, the Hon. Mr Ralston, Col. Boyle, Capt. Hunter-Blair and Capt. Clayton.

Amongst others present were, Sir James and Lady Pendergast, the latter wearing a handsome elare brocade much trimmed with cream silk Maltese lace; also Sir Patrick and Lady Hunter, the latter in a lovely moss green silk with Watteau train trimmed with jewelled embroidery; Sir Osborne and Lady Gibbs, the latter in a handsome silk and wool gown with Maltese collar; Lady Douglas, of Christchurch, in black silk; the Hon. S. Seddon, the Hon. W. P. and Mrs Reeves, the latter wearing pale green silk with big sleeves of bright pink silk; the Hon. A. J. Cadman, Sir Kenneth Douglas, General Schomburgk, and Madama de Lestailot, the latter in grey silk trimmed with black lace; Mrs (Justice) Richmond, in black silk and lace; Mrs Robert Hart, in black, with long shawl of cream silk Maltese lace; Mrs Rhodes of the Grange, black, and diamonds; Mrs Fitzgerald of Clyde Cliffe, black moiré antique; the Rev. and Mrs Sprott, the latter in black velvet softened with white feather trimming; Mrs Newman, a lovely gown of sage green watered silk, trimmed with pink frills, black embroidery, and Madama de Lestailot, the latter in black; Mr Duthie, M.H.L.; Miss Duthie, green velvet with pink frills; Mr and Mrs G. Hutchison, the latter in black; the Hon. C. J. Johnston, and Mrs Johnston in pale grey Pompadour satin; the Hon. W. P. and Mrs Seddon, the latter in a handsome black gown, with broad flounce of cream silk lace caught with bows of ribbon; Mr and Mrs Levin, the latter in pink corded silk, with big sleeves of deep wine coloured velvet; Mr Mentahie, and Mrs Mentahie, in rich white brocade, and diamonds; Mrs Izard, black silk and velvet; Mrs C. Izard, pale blue silk; Mrs T. C. Williams, dark blue velvet with cream lace and pearls; Mrs Hamilton, pale grey silk, with Empire belt; Mr and Mrs Werry, the latter in black brocade; Mr and Mrs Cooper, the latter in black; Mr and Mrs Ferguson, the latter in lemon brocade and black velvet; the Hon. Dr. Grace, and Mrs Grace wearing white brocade with black velvet; Mr and Mrs Castendyck, the latter in black; Mr G. Beetham, and Mrs Beetham in cream Pompadour silk with grey velvet sleeves; Mrs Turnbull, black lace and silk, and diamonds; Dr. Adams, and Mrs Adams in white brocade, the bodice and portion of the skirt edged with white ostrich feathers; Mr and Mrs Travers, the latter in black trimmed with white lace; Capt. Barclay, and Mrs Barclay in black velvet, trained, and trimmed with Maltese lace; Mr and Mrs J. Duncan, the latter wearing a lovely English gown of pale grey watered silk trimmed with white lace; Dr. Collins, and Mrs Collins in a pretty lemon silk with Watteau train, trimmed with mauve frills and gold braid; Mrs Parbit, pink silk, trained and trimmed with dark blue silk; Mrs. S. Parbit, in black; Mr and Mrs. S. Parbit, in black and yellow; Mrs Fancourt, black; Mr and Mrs Stocker, the latter in cream brocade with Empire sash; Mrs Coburn-Hood, cream brocade; Dr. Gillon, and Mrs Gillon in a pretty grey velvet gown; Capt. Edwin, and Mrs Edwin, in black and white, bordered with flowers; Mrs McGregor, black; Mrs Treagar, pale pink silk trimmed with lace; Mr and Mrs Graham, Mrs Douglas, Mr and Mrs L. Wilson, Mrs Willis, the Hon. Ed. Richardson, and Miss Richardson in white with epaulettes of pale blue velvet and chiffon frills; Colonel and Miss Babbington, the latter in white silk; Miss K. Hadfield, a pretty lemon silk gown trimmed with gold fringe, and her sister black with yellow sash; Miss Brandon, black, trimmed with jet; Miss A. Brandon, red trimmed with white lace; Miss Holmes, black and mauve; Miss Turnbull, mauve silk; Miss E. Johnston, a handsome pearl coloured satin brocade with silver, and mauve sleeves; Miss Richmond, blue silk, draped with black and blue lace; Miss E. Richmond, palest grey broché; Miss Williams, a lovely pale blue satin with black velvet sleeves and jet epaulettes; Miss M. Gore, black and white striped gown; Miss A. Grace, white; Miss Izard, white with lemon-coloured sleeves; Miss J. Izard, white with pink puffed sleeves; Miss Ida Johnston, pink brocade with Empire belt; Miss H. Johnston, white silk with huge yellow sleeves and trimmed with lace; Miss Cooper, dark blue velvet and white lace; Miss Douglas, grey silk; Miss Gore, pale blue and white; Miss M. Gore, a pretty mauve gown with huge pink silk sleeves; Miss H. Moorhouse, black; Miss Henry, black and white silk; Miss Barclay, cream, black and blue; Miss H. Moorhouse with pink and blue; Miss Fancourt, black; Miss Tennant, black; Miss Chaytor, a pretty cream broché; Miss Willis, red shot silk with frills of white lace; Miss Graham, black; and her sister, black velvet with pink Watteau bow; the Rev. H. Van Steeren, the Rev. Lyttleton Fitzgerald, the Rev. Father Devoy, Messrs Pynsent, W. Reid, Gillon, Wilson, Mantell, McNeil, Todd, Woolridge, Turnbull, Butterworth, Cooper, Rolleston, Brandon, Gore, Anson, etc.

Nearly all the ladies wore their hair dressed low on the nape of the neck, and most wore nets, and everyone had huge sleeves and trains, and some of the newest dresses were slightly draped, whilst others were simply gathered round the waist just like an old-fashioned petticoat. Diamonds, pearls, and moonstones were the favourite jewels.

RUBY.



ENGAGEMENTS

The engagement has just been announced of Miss Murray, second daughter of Mr. T. L. Murray, of the Bank of New Zealand, Thames, with Mr. W. Stewart, Home Bay, Ponsonby.

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